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EDITORS' TABLE.

EDITORS: A. S. PACKARD AND E. D. COPE.

— The editors of the *AMERICAN NATURALIST* wish to call the attention of American students to the fact that their pages are open for the prompt publication of summaries of the results of original investigation, which for any reason it may be deemed desirable to place on record before the issuance of the completed account. Looked at merely as a means of securing priority, preliminary communications are not over praiseworthy. The credit of making a discovery should not be the sole end of investigation, and an attempt to hurry into print so as to forestall some other worker in the same line is not highly meritorious. The student of science should have a higher aim; and happily quarrels for priority are far less frequent than they have been in years past, thus indicating that a higher end has been sought. Preliminary communications have another value than the mere anticipation of another. They place before others, working in the same line, an outline of the results at the earliest possible moment, and thus often furnish invaluable assistance. Fully as great is their value to the student working in another line. The completed paper is usually long and frequently prolix, so that it is a severe drain upon the time to wade through it for the facts desired. The preliminary communication, on the other hand, is usually short and concise; it contains only the more salient facts and omits the larger part of the speculations. In this way it becomes more easily available for reference, while it does not withdraw from the value of the more detailed article. From these two points of view the preliminary communication is valuable and deserves encouragement.

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RECENT LITERATURE.

SMITH'S "ALBATROSS" CRUSTACEA.¹—The dredgings of the U. S. Fish Commission steamer *Albatross* are turning up a wonderful deep-sea fauna, and placing the work done by American students in this direction at least on a par with that done in Europe. In the present paper 107 species of decapods are recorded as having been taken in the collections of 1883 and 1884, and of these but two are described as new in the present paper. Novel-

¹ *Sidney I. Smith's Report on the decapod Crustacea of the "Albatross" dredgings off the east coast of the United States during the summer and autumn of 1884.* Rep. U. S. Fish Commis. for 1885, pp. 101, 20 plates, 1886.

ties are, however, but a slight test of the value of any contribution to science, and the present instance is no exception. The principal feature of this paper is the extent to which it increases our knowledge of the bathymetrical distribution of the forms enumerated, and points out the coincidences between depth of occurrence and points of structure. These lists record forty-three species as coming from below the 1000 fathom line, while twenty-two were taken from a depth greater than 2000 fathoms. The greatest depth recorded is 2949 fathoms, and from a single station of this depth, about 350 miles east of the mouth of the Chesapeake the trawl brought up *Acantheephyra agassizii*, *A. brevirostris*, *Notostomus vascus*, *Hymenodora glacialis*, *Parapasiphaë sulcatifrons*, *Hepomadus tener* and *Sergestes mollis*. Of the pertinence of the first of these to these great depths some doubt is expressed, as at another time one was caught swimming at the surface. All of these forms it is to be noted are macrurous.

Some of the deep-sea forms are colorless, but most are of some bright shade of red or orange. Their eyes have undergone a careful superficial examination. In some the black pigment, the corneal facets and the like are much as in shallow-water forms, except that occasionally the eyes are smaller. In *Munidopsis* and *Pentacheles* the visual elements are apparently lacking, while in others the pigment is light colored and the visual elements are reduced in number. In some of the deep-water shrimps there is a curious accessory organ borne on the eye-stalks which may be phosphorescent in its nature. It certainly deserves careful histological examination at competent hands. In the eggs, too, a peculiarity is noticed. Among the shallow-water decapods the eggs are usually so small that it is a matter of some difficulty to cut sections of them, but in these deep-water forms they attain a very considerable size, those of *Parapasiphaë sulcatifrons* having a diameter fifteen times those of the common soft-shelled crab, *Neptunus hastatus*.

We have a little fault to find with the present paper. The first is that which is found in all of the Fish Commission publications, but which here is not as bad as in embryological work—the use of process cuts. We notice a tendency to the creation of new families which hardly seems to be warranted. Until we know more of the morphology of the crustacean gill it hardly seems advisable to make gill-structure alone the basis of forming higher groups and separating widely species which are in all other respects closely allied.

SEDGWICK AND WILSON'S BIOLOGY.¹—We have several guides to laboratory work in biology, but the great fault with all is that they stick too closely to the anatomical and developmental sides

¹ *General Biology*. By WILLIAM T. SEDGWICK and EDMUND B. WILSON. New York, H. Holt & Co. pp. vii + 193. 1886.